

Melanie Harry

## **Big Ideas and Digital Artmaking in the Classroom**

## **Introduction**

For as long as I can remember, I have always been fond of learning and especially fond of art. While pursuing my art education and ceramics degrees at Miami University, I knew I wanted to continue my education to earn my Masters. I wasn't sure what path to take. The masters program at Miami was cut and under revision. I knew that I wanted to settle down in Columbus because I loved living in Pickerington while growing up. After doing a little bit of research, I was convinced that the online Master's program of Art Education at The Ohio State University was for me. It would be perfect because I could begin my teaching career and continue to study simultaneously.

I accepted my first job at Summit Academy Elementary and Middle School of Columbus. I was responsible for teaching art to grades k-8 and also assisting the other specials teachers. It is a school for high functioning autism, ADHD, and related disorders. I embarked on creating a curriculum that would encompass all of the art processes I wanted the kids to learn and also hit on important cultural and cross curricular topics. During this first year of teaching, I began to gear up for graduate school. I submitted my work and fortunately was accepted.

I began the online program in the summer of 2010. I was excited to meet the other art educators in the program and learn about the course I would complete. It was so fun to have "art teacher talk" with all the other students in the program. I was most excited to learn about all of the new knowledge I would gain. My biggest reason for joining the program was because I knew the teachers and teachings of the

program were completely different than that of Miami. I knew that this was a step in the right direction to become an even stronger teacher. As a person that has dedicated herself to the education system, I know how important it is to be a lifelong learner.

The program has been everything and more than I expected it to be. I have had the experience of meeting and learning from an array of professors on campus. Each has added their own unique touch to the experience of the program and each has taught a class that has been crucial to my learning experiences as a working art educator. I also loved that I got to meet all the students in my cohort and the professor who would teach the first classes over the summer. I knew whom I was talking to when posting online. During the year while working online, I still felt connected to the people in my cohort and also could work at my own pace. I enjoyed creating art and reading at my own convenience during the workweek or weekend. Most importantly, the program has given me the chance to make art and reflect upon my teaching. Because I was a newer teacher when starting the program, I have been constantly reflecting and adjusting my teaching practices in these first years. It has made me understand my learners, create stronger units of study, and understand how well I am doing as an educator.

The essays in this portfolio describe my experiences with two important classes of the masters program. The first is a look into the artmaking class with Dr. Walker. It is taken during the beginning of the program and is the big intro into the ideas of the program, BIG IDEAS!

The second essay is a review of the digital texts class. This class was taken in the summer in between the two years of study. Dr. E led students through the experience of creating art with technology and using the art of story making. It is a crucial class that art educators of today need because it helps keep us involved in the technology and culture of our students today. Both classes have had a huge impact on the ways I think about making art and abilities to create lessons that highly motivate my students, and most importantly, get them learning!

### **Teaching Artmaking with Meaning**

Many teachers rely on their previous experiences in the art room to guide them in how to teach. Teaching seems natural to many of us. It is a job we have all witnessed and have experienced different variations of. We get to know our teachers each year of school and learn the designated content in their style and structure. Many of us look up to our teachers and have had both positive and negative experiences. When we decide to become teachers, often we look back to a teacher inspiring us to do so. We model many of our teaching methods from our previous experiences with teachers.

That was one of the open conversations at the beginning of the course. Why do we continue to model after our teachers that came before us? If this is a trend that these teachers followed, then we can assume they are modeling practices that they have seen from other teachers. Which means one could conclude that the practices used by current teachers are outdated and not meeting our student's needs. This was the opener and ah-ha moment of the course. We need to teach art

making with meaning, not teach what we were taught just because it has become some sort of standard curriculum to teach. For instance, is a color wheel worthy of a week of instruction? How much is the student taking away while diligently mixing paints to match various hues?

A large paper was plastered to the wall. We excitedly listed off the exciting, interesting, and relevant topics to teach our students. It isn't a surprise that color wheels and principles of art weren't listed on the paper. So then why was so much time spent on these practices? Why are art teachers stuck teaching in old styles with old information? What are the new ways to teach artmaking? How can students truly connect to their art and have it positively impact their lives? These were the ideas to be explored in the course...or rather the BIG IDEA!

The whole idea of teaching from a BIG IDEA was completely new to me. I had never heard of this practice from my professors or from an art education text. My undergraduate art educators had a discipline based art education background. I therefore, took what they had to say and molded it into my own. I believed it was important to become knowledgeable about the different tools and medias of art while learning about various artists from the history of art. I knew it was important to learn about different cultures and for students to be able to put their own unique twists on a project. I didn't, however, have an understanding of the current era of artists and practices.

Teaching the BIG IDEA meant giving students a topic and then allowing them to explore this topic. Some parts of the assignment could be set, such as medium, size, or content. This was very appealing to me. I was happy to allow my students to

explore various topics and come up with creative and meaningful ideas. It seemed like what I was already doing, except it gave more meaning to the students. It gave them an opportunity to study their society and world in current time. It meant their art would mean more and they would gain a better connection with the artmaking process and product.

My lessons and unit plan development took a new turn. I tried to plan out lessons that would revolve around a central idea and medium. When thinking of how to explore BIG IDEAS, I decided it would be best to explore the same idea multiple times and in a range of media so that the students would gain a huge understanding of this way of making art. The first lessons I wrote revolved around identity. The students explore identity by creating collages, paintings, and gesture drawings. We explored the parts of ones identity, artists like Bearden and Matisse, and also had discussions of present day culture.

My teaching practices evolved. I was planning several parts to each project, not just creating an assignment. I created units that had layers and had more expectations of what students needed to include in their artwork. I held discussions and learned about cultural elements with my students such as new slang, musical artists, and symbols they found to be important. I believe that by studying identity, they were teaching me a lot about themselves and what they considered to be important or relevant. I also explore new artists to study and thought about what artwork was important to show them. It wasn't so much about studying the art history, but learning about artists who explored big ideas and medium that connected with the assignment.

I was excited to see a change in my student's work. The pieces were becoming more unique and had more meaning. A parent couldn't just walk down the hallway and easily understand the artwork. There was more behind it. I also didn't have to fight off students mimicking my example and trying to follow a cookie cutter project. The projects were becoming even more unique and meaningful to the students.



American Gothic Self Portrait (project from year before starting OSU master's program)



Identity Self Portraits (project from year one of OSU

master's program.

When looking at the images, it is clear that the second image is much more individual and unique. It doesn't look like a particular historical artist and or any of the other pieces in the class. I believe the second image also expresses the artist's personality, preferences, and identifies with today's culture. I have also seen a difference in my student's participation in class discussions. They have a better grasp on understanding the BIG IDEAS and feel a lot more confident making their own unique designs. I enjoy that they do not compare their artwork and ideas to that of historical artist's; they obviously pull from their own personality, likes, interests, and cultural background.

My classroom is set up very similar to how it was before starting this class. The main differences would be that I display a bulletin board with the BIG IDEA and images that could relate to it. The images are not art works; they are photographs of people, animals, places, or things that relate to the big idea. I have found that makes



a big difference. Students pull from these ideas and make their own art rather than mimicking what an artist has already done.

Many changes occurred as a result of the course. I believe it changed the way that I think about artmaking as a whole. I remember when this course began; I was sitting in a hospital room with several bracelets snapped to my wrists and band-aids covering pricks all over my arms. I was crying everyday and desperate to continue my pregnancy with the outcome of a healthy baby. There was nothing else I could do or think about. I was forced to think about my studies and artmaking as a result of assignments due in the course. I used the artmaking assignments as a way to deal with my circumstances. I had never used artmaking as a therapeutic process and I had never connected it to myself as deeply as I did during this class. I believe that it greatly impacted my understanding of how the actual process of making art can affect an individual.

The assignments that I created during the class had immense value. Not because the finished product was worthy of a museum, but because I had connected with it so much while creating it. I exerted a lot of thought and care when creating each assignment and there was a deep personal connection to what I was doing. I realized how important this was and I couldn't believe I had made art for so long without connecting to it in such a way. It gave me a release and my emotions could play themselves out. I felt as though I could express myself and deal with the awful situation I was in. I especially needed the artmaking when I lost my son. It was a way for me to grieve and it allowed me to think and process my life in a way that was constructive and positive.

After experiencing the artmaking process in such a positive way, I knew I needed to find a gateway for my students to do the same. This made me rethink how I set up my units of study. I decided, as I stated before, to revolve around one big idea for multiple lessons, but change up subtopics and mediums used. This allowed the students to deeply work with, and expand their ideas of their BIG IDEA. I found that dipping into a BIG IDEA for one lesson wasn't enough. Many times the surface was skimmed and they didn't really become involved in the assignment. When the assignments connected and built upon each other, students developed their ideas more and more each lesson.

Many of my existing teaching practices sparkled with the new lessons. I have always given ample individual attention to each student and hit upon different learning styles when teaching a lesson. I expanded my practices by having deeper conversations with students about personal connections to their works and opening up assignments to be broader. I also have worked with other teachers to connect even more to core subjects. As a result, students reference their art projects or ideas learned in art in class and vice versa. This makes me believe I am having a big impact on my students.

The student work has become more exploratory when it comes to materials used and ideas expressed. I really enjoy how my students have used their imagination and have exceeded my expectations when exploring new ideas.



This is an image of a third grade autistic student exploring his identity and portraiture through mixed media. He enjoyed getting to use materials of his choice and apply them in his own individual way. He became deeply engaged in the artmaking process. I was very impressed by the way he manipulated and identified with the process while creating a piece of artwork that expressed himself. I realized my students were able to connect with the artmaking process in a way similar to how I did because they had a chance to enjoy the process and deeply express themselves in individualistic ways.

The environment of my classroom changed by the array of materials offered to the students. I like to display a multitude of options for students to work with so

that they may select their materials and become inspired by the process as they work.

My beliefs of the basics of art education have changed and evolved. I believe that the basic DBAE style of teaching has a place in the art room, but BIG IDEAS have definitely found a place in my room. My beliefs about which artists are important have changed. I now understand the importance of studying current artists and connecting with my student's present culture. I abandoned the belief that students needed to have lessons centered on past artists such as Van Gogh or Monet. I now incorporate those kinds of artists with units of study in which they are an additional use for inspiration of style, subject matter, etc.

When it comes to my lesson and unit planning, I began thinking about my entire year as one big learning period rather than thinking of each project as it's own separate unit. Before, I would do projects that focused on medium and exploring an artist or culture. It was focused on one main idea that was to be studied. Now, I create units of study that work with the BIG IDEA. All of my units of study connect and build upon each other. I am able to pull upon past lessons when introducing a new lesson and the units of study make sense. They are often expanding upon an idea previously studied. I still like to pull from a variety of artists, cultures, and media, but it all makes sense now that it revolves around the big idea and focuses on current ideas and culture.

As I have stated above, many of my teaching practices have remained the same. I enjoy presenting images via PowerPoint, which I did before. I really enjoy my big ideas bulletin board, which gives the students the chance to explore

and identify with real images (not just artwork). I also now try to incorporate art from around the city. I have an “I heart art” area and it has all kinds of images of murals and community art that can be found around Columbus.

I have found that a big difference in how I organize and display my student work has come out of the BIG IDEAS change. I now don't have as many projects to hang and cover the walls. I am not pumping projects out of my students. It seems as though we are not making art for arts sake, but rather the process and time in the art room has become more important than the display of finished projects.

Since the practice of focusing on the process rather than the product has occurred, the physical environment of my room has changed. There is a lot more clutter of projects and it feels more like a studio space. I have various recycled materials all over my classroom and there are always images and materials out to inspire the students. One thing that has remained the same is that I am always trying to make the room an inspiring place. One thing I cherish from my undergrad experience is that I was taught to transform the room to inspire the kids and make them feel like they are a part of the lesson. The below image is an example of a day studying castles and Loch Ness during my art practicum at Miami. The kids really enjoyed pretending like they were knights or princesses. I think it's important to cater to the imagination of young children.



Image of “Saturday Art” classroom during undergraduate at Miami University.

The biggest problem I encountered when beginning the program was an immediate wall I put up when thinking I didn’t understand artmaking. I believed I was a strong educator and I understood what I was doing and I loved the lessons I came up with. I didn’t understand there was a whole different way to teach art. I learned from my undergrad professors and from all the art teachers I ever had. So how could I be doing anything wrong? The artmaking course really opened my eyes. As I stated earlier in the paper, I had a therapeutic experience with artmaking while creating all of the assignments.

While tackling all of the assignments, I had difficulties thinking outside of my comfort zone and trying to let go while making my art. I am very used to creating ceramics on the wheel and although I don’t have full control of the exact piece, I have a good idea of exactly what I am creating; This will be a bowl, I will eat out of

the bowl. When creating the artworks in this course, I had to let go of sketching or imagining a final product. I had to experience the different artmaking processes. I remember one in particular in which I had to use action verbs to create my artwork. I was terrified to randomly pick the words, convinced I would get stuck with a word I absolutely wouldn't know how to use. Then when I got the words such as "tear" I didn't know what to do. It ended up being a really neat experience. I had to becoming totally involved and focused on the action of the process, not the product.

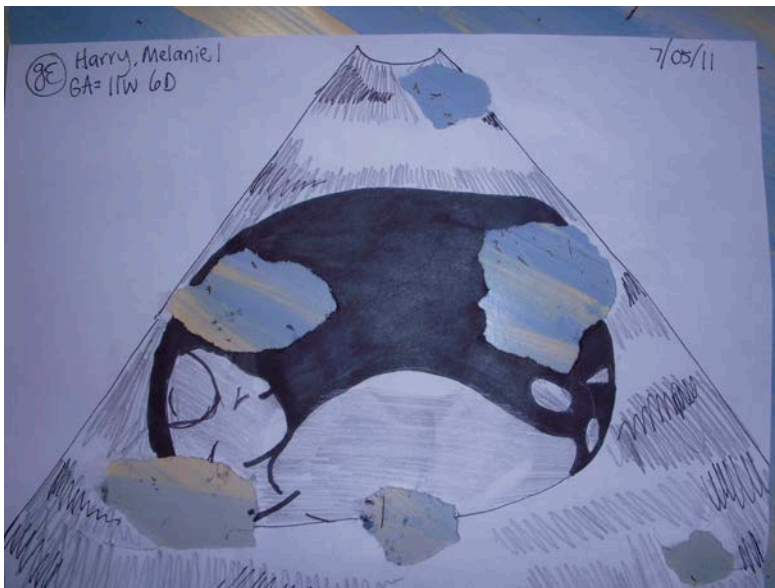


Image of "Tear" from

artmaking course

Once I experienced the artmaking course, I had an understanding of how I wanted to present the ideas in my lessons and units. A big problem I faced was I saw my students every other week for 2 days. That meant whatever assignment I began would either have to be completed in 2 days of class or would be stretched out. My assignments were very stretched out as a result of trying to expand upon the artmaking process. It also doesn't help that students could be absent during art class

or get pulled out for speech or occupational therapy sessions. I found it very frustrating that the lessons would stretch over a whole month. By the time students were finishing up, it seemed as though they had lost the excitement in making their projects, they just wanted to finish. Because students seemed to not handle projects being dragged out, I decided to change my teaching practices this school year. I now break up the lesson into little mini units of artmaking. This has had a positive impact on the students work and has held their attention. They seem to grasp the concepts more because they are repeated in several small artmaking assignments rather than one large one that they end up rushing to finish. The student work has turned out as a higher quality and the thinking process behind the work is more meaningful.

Below is an example of a project studying Andy Goldsworthy. Students had two mini assignments of working with materials and the ideas of PLACE and ENVIRONMENT. The projects were done in timed intervals and they got to mix the materials and do multiple artworks. Each one was taken apart after a photo was taken, which allowed them to enjoy the artmaking process and not focus on the final product.



Image of paper leaves





Image of land art with found objects

When creating artworks such as the Andy Goldsworthy project, I found the outdoor area of the school to be difficult to work with. We are not in a safe neighborhood and the school grounds are very limited. As you can see from the above image, materials in and outside the art room are very limited; I believe that is one of the struggles of our physical environment. Students were forced to pick from materials in the immediate area. There was a lot of garbage thrown down near our lot from the highway and there was also poison ivy covering any materials they could have gathered from the woods. I look forward to having a new school next year. Our property will be ten acres, which would give me the opportunity to work with the kids outside and give them a big open outdoor studio space to work and explore. I believe this will encourage the artmaking process and open their imaginations.

I made several evaluations about myself as an art educator as I took the artmaking course. One of my first was to evaluate what I found valuable and believed needed to be taught. I realized I was completely in the dark about current art education practices and artists. I needed to research and become aware of what

was most relevant to my students. I have continued to research and evaluate new artists to include in my teaching. I also evaluate the way they are included in lessons and units. I realized that my units weren't connected enough and that many of the artists didn't make sense together. I am also ashamed to admit I went an entire school year only studying male artists! As a female artist, I cannot believe I allowed this to happen. I evaluate each lesson and the information, such as big idea, artist, and concepts, presented in the lesson and then develop units that make sense. Using the big idea and concentrating on making the artmaking process the focal point is crucial.

The teaching practices I have evaluated are how I present lessons and how I make materials available to the students. I am working to have materials available for the students so that they may research during their studio work time. The BIG IDEAS bulletin board has really helped and the kids understand it is an accessible place to find useful images and information. I have also created an art folder that is a place for them to store their sketches, ideas, and photos. I also have valuable information about assessment and current Columbus artists. The kids value their folders and use them appropriately. Making these changes to my practices has greatly impacted the quality of student work and they value their artmaking time during studio work time. The physical environment has become one of exploration. Students talk about assignment ideas amongst each other and get up to explore each other's work. I also hear them chatter about assignments to other teacher's and during different class periods. I really enjoy when they stop me in the hall and ask, "Mrs. Harry, are we having art today?"

## **Digital Texts**

The digital texts course was taken over my second summer. At this time, I had a relationship with the students in the course and my professor. The duration of the course was taken in the computer lab. There were small goals throughout the week to learn how to incorporate art with technology. Examples include: using powerpoint as an art form, using the microphones on the computers to add voice to images or text, using photoshop to manipulate images, and learning how to use imovie.

One of the smaller projects was to create a poem. During this time, students were told to write a poem and use images and microphone to add images and sound to the poem.

The main goal for the course was to create a digital text. Dr. E showed us some digital text examples on youtube. We watched several different examples to get a vibe for what we would be creating. Some the texts were deeply personal and others were very simple. We each became inspired and were given a length to aim for. Dr. E showed us all the mechanics of imovie and we became ready to use it as an art medium

The rest of the week became a hustle and bustle of movie making. We worked together and alone. We talked over our ideas with each other and went to quiet spaces to record our voices. Each of us took on a unique path to finish the assignment. At the end of the week, we sat around with twizzlers and candy just like it was a movie night. We watched each digital text and gave our praise and opinions. Each one was an amazing way to use digital media as an artmaking form.

The idea of using digital media was not completely new to me. We had experienced using powerpoint as an art media in our first course of the program. Imovie, however, was a completely new idea. I had a very minimal amount of experience with imovie and had no idea how to use it. I immediately shrunk into my chair, how was I going to make an artwork for my final project out of a media I had no idea how to use. Dr. E reassured us that we would be able to handle it and she would teach us the basics. I did not believe it was going to be easy or that I would have a successful project.

I value digital media for everything it does for me, but not as an art medium. I am the person that has every ridiculous problem with anything digital. For this reason, I didn't value the computer as a source to make art. I had only known it as a means of failure. In fact, my high school German and art teacher both created separate assignments for me because I managed to crash the computers I was working on whenever I had an assignment in their class. I became exempted from computers. One of my undergrad professors assigned a grad student to help me complete a simple photo shop assignment. The grad student and I went down in flames. My piece only got finished after extended time and wiggling around the assignment directions. As one can see, I was not the kind of student to become enthusiastic over a computer assignment.

After experiencing the course, I knew I wanted to incorporate digital media into my lesson plans. The dilemma was that I do not have the option to use any kind of digital media in my classroom unless it is my own stuff. I own the projector, macbook, and digital camera I use at school. I don't want the kids to ruin my

personal things, and I don't have enough time for them to have guided computer time. I came up with the idea to do a collaborative computer assignment incorporating a sculpture project and the computer in a digital texts inspired way, but my administration took away my final art days for Ohio Achievement Assessments.

My teaching practices were not able to alter in the classroom because I don't have the supplies to use digital media as I stated above. My ideas for future assignments have evolved when it comes to digital media. I believe my ideas for how technology can be used in the classroom have completely changed. I know now that I am capable of using technology as an artmaking media. I am confident in the style of using digital texts with imovie and I know it would have a positive impact on my students. The one way I can say this class did alter my teaching practices in general is that I have a much deeper understanding of the importance of media and current cultural elements in the art classroom. I have allowed my students to use more images and objects that represent current culture such as television show characters and action figure character dolls to draw inspirations relating to projects such as identity.

The student work has evolved and became more personal to the students. Many of the students have commented on how they become excited about assignments. My middle school students really enjoy relating their artwork to personal inspirations related to their current culture like I stated above ( television, books, action figures, sports, toy, etc). The elementary students have gained a new

perspective on how art can be individualized to their own unique ideas and how art topics can relate to their regular classroom learning's as well.



This artwork is an example of middle school work from the street art unit we completed. Students were encouraged to relate to the movie we watched in class, "Exit Through the Gift Shop," and media/imagery from their current culture. His favorite character on "The Walking Dead," who is a cop, inspired this student. He combined that idea with the where he wanted to place his artwork, our principal, Mr. Wheeler's door. I was glad I have become more open to students using our current culture and ideas from digital media, like television shows, to create their

artworks. The above artwork is really funny and tells a story about where it was placed. These were two strong ideas I wanted the students to express. I also really wanted students to express their identity in their street art.

The physical environment of my room has not changed in relation to the digital texts class in a large way. I now have more images of current culture artworks like murals and street art in Columbus, which I think is a result of understanding how much current cultural media is important to my students and teaching. I do not have any new technology for students to work with, but I hope to get computers or ipads for the students to work with in the future. I am hopeful I will be able to get the supplies when we move to our new school or perhaps through a future purchase order or grant.

My beliefs and values of technological media as an art medium have completely changed. I see now that it can be used in an easy to teach manner that can be a very creative media for students to use. I once believed that the computer programs offered were frustrating and not artistic. I now know because of the course that I will be able to use computers as an art resource, imovie in particular. I now value this resource as a way that kids of this generation will be able to express themselves. It's really important for this digital generation of learners to be able to use this medium. I think it will only become more important in the future.

I have planned lessons that I hope I will be able to do in the future when I have the time and resources. A lesson I am currently working on involves students working with the BIG IDEA of environment and sculpting monster homes. Students would create a set (floor, 2 walls, corner) of a monster home. This would include

the elements important to their monster they would sculpt. The finished product would be a monster that would be proportional to the set/home. The two would be a finished product and I would like students to cooperate to work together or make monsters that live in a community and interact. I would like to be able to do a stop motion movie with the monsters and different sets. The students would get to make the voice and script for their monster. I think this would be a really neat way to use imovie and to be able to have students work together. I really want to do this lesson this school year, but unfortunately as stated above, I will not have the time to do so. I am hoping to do this project and future ones like it and utilize the digital media I learned about during the class. It would be neat for students to express themselves in a digital text also using the monsters.

Changes to my teaching practice haven't been dramatic, but have slowly unfolded as the master's program progressed. I have, as stated earlier, been more open to digital media and students using imagery from their current generational culture. I have noticed how the students have been excited to use imagery that inspires them from their own interests and likes. This has been very important because for much of the year, middle school has been studying identity. They have been able to dive into projects and use their ideas about their culture (characters, toys, etc). I have noticed a huge excitement.

Student work has become very personal and the kids are really pumped. When students created their street art, they jumped at the chance to use their own doodles and characters that they had created. They were so excited to use these images and express themselves in ways unique to themselves.





This is an example a sixth grader created when we were doing street art. He was eager to use the character he had created, but most importantly the toast. He creates characters and imagery revolving around toast. It was very exciting for him to be able to incorporate the toast imagery into his artwork and that I didn't see it as dumb or not artistic. He really enjoyed the unit of street art.

The physical environment of my room has not had any huge changes. The layout and basics of my room are the same. Some big changes I have made are my big ideas bulletin board, display of Columbus art, and art folders.

The big ideas bulletin board is a place where images and ideas are pinned for students to see. They are able to look at imagery to get inspired or sometimes see something they have never seen. When studying birds, many of my students had never seen images of some birds such as pelicans, storks, humming birds, and toucans. They were really interested in looking at them and used them as observational tools when learning about the different parts of different birds.

The display of Columbus art is an area of images that students could find around Columbus. They are images of street art and murals. Some of them are located in their neighborhoods. This excited the students because they could proudly point out artworks they had seen and they were excited to learn about the art in their town. The art folders are a way for students to communicate how they are doing on a project, put their sketches in, include art worksheets, and have an art reflection. I have included the bulletin board, Columbus art display, and art folders as a result of this class because I realized how much imagery the students needed and could relate to. I do not have access to computers in my room unless I bring in my mac (and I can't get on search sites if I bring my computer) and I started to understand how important these images were. I try to think of images the students will need on assignments and have those ready for students to view. It's almost like I am predicating the search engine requests. Below is an image in my Columbus art section of my classroom.



Beliefs and values that I have abandoned, as stated earlier, have to do with my relationship with computers. I now believe it is possible to have a successful unit or lesson that deals with technology. I have a stronger understanding of the necessity of children of this generation to be able to use technology to express themselves. They are encompassed in a world in which everything they do has to do with technology. The human race is only going to evolve to include more technology, so it is important that I have a grasp on it now and keep up.

My lessons and units of study have evolved. The old practices that I have abandoned are sticking to a DBAE style like I was taught in undergraduate. I focus more on the art making process and making units that work as a whole. My students have enjoyed working with the BIG IDEAS and having a unit of study that involves many small lessons or projects as opposed to having a unit with one big project. One of my favorite units this school year was working with environment

and birds with my elementary students. We studied different kinds of birds and where they live. We also observed the different characteristics of birds depending on their environment. The students worked on three projects in this unit of study. The first was a clay bird rattle. Students made a functioning rattle and designed it to have characteristics of a bird of choice. The students were so neat with the details they added. Some of them even had angry bird styles. The next project was a bird nest. Students created a nest and thought about how birds choose items from their environment and we talked about environment in relation to home. During the last part, students decorated their own egg to go inside the nest. Below are some images of the nests students created.



My teaching practices have evolved as well to make me into a stronger teacher. I have gained a lot of new skills like developing larger units of study focused around one BIG IDEA, creating art student reflection and assessment sheets, and working more with current cultural elements. I think the technology has gained an importance, but more importantly I saw how important it was to give students an opportunity to use story telling. Story telling is such a strong way to express oneself. It is something that everyone does on a regular basis. I really enjoyed getting to use this medium, and I think my students really enjoy telling stories with their artwork. This is a new practice I have most certainly adopted. Some practices I have abandoned include: disciple based projects, projects without assessments, and not allowing students to use media/characters as much in their work.

Much of my practices with student work has changed because the projects are smaller and build upon each other. The environment and bird unit, for example, had several small projects that worked together in one unit. I still like to display student work and take images of it. Middle school students are expected to critique and assess their own work as well as reflect on the unit of study.

The physical environment has changed in ways stated earlier in the essay such as the BIG IDEA bulletin board, the Columbus art image area, and the art folders. These have created an environment that gets the kids engaged in what they are doing and gives them an awareness of art around their town. I also like to have the self-assessment sheets in student folders. This gets the kids actively thinking about the project goals and the attributes of their artwork.

My problems and difficulties with the course were as mentioned previously in the essay. I had some issues with confidence in my abilities of working with the technology used in the course. I was very inexperienced with imovie and using the microphones on the computer. I unfortunately did not have the opportunity to take a graphic design class or use imovie in undergraduate, so this was my first real college class centered around technology. I had a belief that I would not be able to use the technology in a successful manner. I didn't think my presentation would be worthy of the class. I didn't really value the computers as a means of artmaking. I didn't have a problem with becoming inspired however. I knew I wanted to do something centered around my pregnancy and past pregnancy. This has been a theme for me during my graduate studies because it has been a big part of my life while in grad school. I was really excited to learn how to make art and use the important sonogram images of my babies.





The ideas presented in the course were to incorporate digital text into units and lesson plans. I really like the idea of being able to do this, however, as stated above, I do not have the means in my classroom to do so. My students are at a low poverty level and they do not have the technology to use at home either. This is disappointing and I am hoping to gain the resources and use them in the future. The class has for sure inspired me to use the course material in future lessons.

My immediate problem I faced with my teaching practices and the course was the idea of teaching technology when I feel that the current generations of students have a lot of technological knowledge. I didn't want to be a position that I felt as if the students were more advanced than myself. Although it is nice for students to teach me new things, I didn't want to feel as if I couldn't help them learn. After the course was complete, I felt that I had an appropriate amount of knowledge that I would be capable of conducting a digital text or technology centered lesson and I would be enough of a help to students for troubleshooting.

I believe that students would feel completely excited to work with digital texts. Student work would be phenomenal. My current middle school students are very involved in creating plays and writing their own books. They have their own secret clubs, agencies, and alter egos. I know that if I had the chance to create digital texts with the students they would be really involved and would make projects the students would be excited to watch.

In conclusion, the major issues I have with the ideas presented in the course was the use of technology. I do not have access to such materials and this is a very frustrating predicament to be in. During this day and age, I would think that it



would be normal for classroom teachers to have access to computers and technology. I am hoping that the physical environment of my new classroom next year will have the technology I need to successfully incorporate the resources I have gained from this class. I am very grateful I had the opportunity to learn a new way of artmaking and the confidence to use technology as an artmaking medium.

### **Conclusion**

The online masters program has been an experience I am truly grateful for. I feel as though I now have a stronger grasp on the concepts I want to teach my students. I understand how important the artmaking process is and I have new and innovative ways to teach my students. I have truly gained skills in every aspect of my career from designing creative lessons, understanding assessment, using technology, developing an understanding of current artists, and refining my ability to reflect. I also have gained the experiences of working with creativity and BIG IDEAS. These have been fundamental to my teachings and curriculum planning. My biggest surprise was gaining the thoughts and opinions of others in the cohort. These people have become a group of friends or almost colleagues as we have worked together to become stronger art teachers through the program. Some of us reside in Ohio, but others come from the east coast, Michigan, and Tennessee. It has been a neat experience to learn about what is going on with art education in other states and how these other teachers are applying the same ideas of the program to their own classrooms.

The essays have been a great opportunity for me to reflect on what I have learned in the program and how it has been applied to my teachings. I have grown in so many ways in such a short period of time. Writing gave me the opportunity to look back on what was most important to me and how it impacted me as an artist and art teacher. I can truly say I have gained all that I hoped for and I have grown as an art teacher, and even as an artist. I am truly appreciative of all that I have learned and am eager to continue my career as an art educator with all the skills I have learned. I believe anyone who is serious about being the best teacher they can be should figure out the BIG IDEAS located at Ohio State.